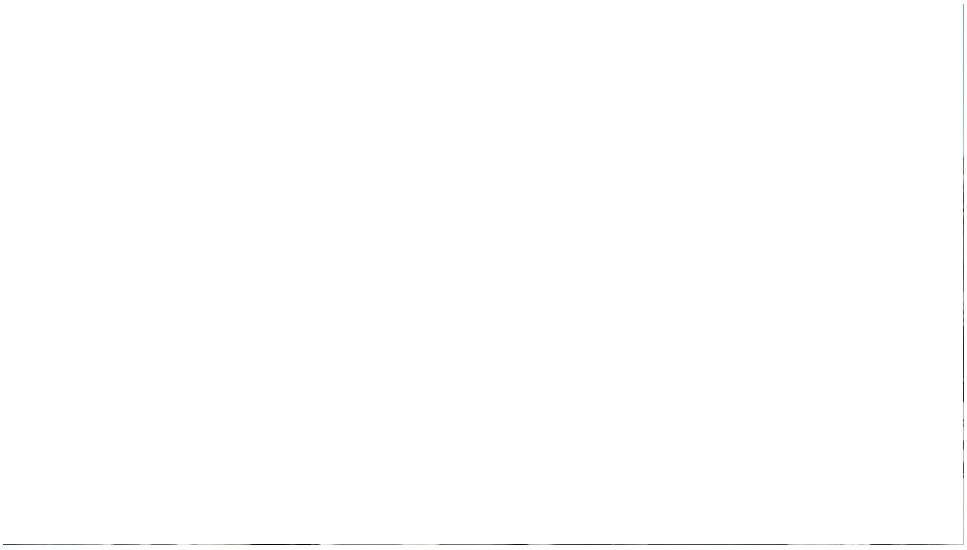
VANCOUVER | News

Thousands crowd Vancouver hospital for rally against 'tyranny' of vaccine mandates



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Updated Sept. 1, 2021 10:19 p.m. EDT
Published Sept. 1, 2021 6:50 p.m. EDT

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VANCOUVER - A large crowd gathered outside Vancouver General Hospital on Wednesday to rally against what participants described as the "tyranny" of limited vaccination requirements.

Police estimated about 2,000 people came together for the event, which was billed as one of several protests against vaccine mandates planned across Canada.

"Stand up for freedom now or lose everything," reads a poster for the rally, which welcomed unvaccinated and unmasked attendees.

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Mayor Kennedy Stewart told CTV News he has little patience for this particular group of protesters, suggesting that they "just stay the hell home."

"Just stop this," he said, addressing those who took part in the demonstration. "Join with us and let's end COVID, rather than taking risks and spreading it and worst of all intimidating health-care workers."

Vancouver Coastal Health said that hospital operations and access to patient care were not impacted by the demonstration, but a number of social media users reported delays getting to appointments and other trouble caused by the crowd.

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Hours into the demonstration, Const. Tania Visintin told CTV News that officers had not experienced any trouble with the crowd, but would be continually monitoring and assessing the situation.

Asked whether there are any health concerns for police standing among the masses of largely unmasked and unvaccinated individuals, Visintin noted that it was an open-air event.

"If they're ever put in a position where they feel unsafe, they have the appropriate PPE to wear at their disposal," she added.

The protesters eventually marched away from the hospital

down Cambie Street, where social media video captured an ambulance trying to navigate the crowd down the busy corridor. The rally then continued outside Vancouver City Hall, before heading downtown over the Cambie Bridge.

Authorities have asked the public to avoid the area of the roving protest.

B.C. health officials have announced vaccination will soon be mandatory for workers in long-term care homes, where vulnerable seniors have been dying despite getting both doses of vaccine.

Provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry has explained that while vaccination is beneficial to all eligible age groups

while vaccination is beneficial to all eligible age groups, some seniors' bodies are less capable of mounting as robust a defence against the disease after being immunized.

When unvaccinated staff members introduce COVID-19 into care homes, it can then have devastating results, Henry said.

During B.C.'s fourth wave of cases, which has largely been fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant, the province's seven-day average for coronavirus deaths has increased back up to 2.29, after reaching as low as 0.14 in early August. The vast majority of recent deaths have involved people who are at least 80 years old.

This week, the provincial health officer also indicated the government is working on potentially expanding the mandate to other parts of the health-care sector, but said they are still in discussions with unions and other stakeholders.

"We know there are some settings where it is incredibly important to prevent transmission of this virus," she said, pointing to acute care, home care and community care as examples.

Workers in long-term care homes and assisted-living facilities are required to have both doses of COVID-19 vaccine by Oct. 12, according to the province.

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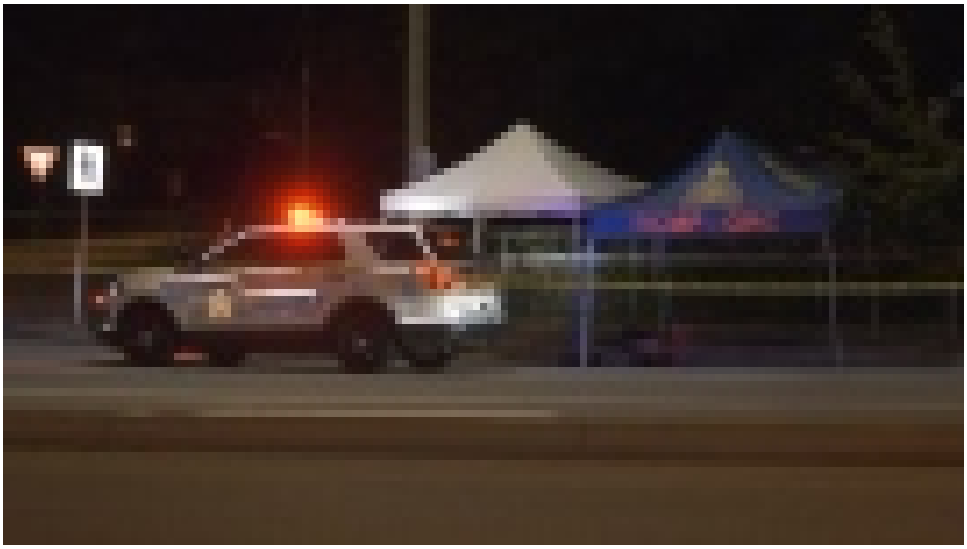

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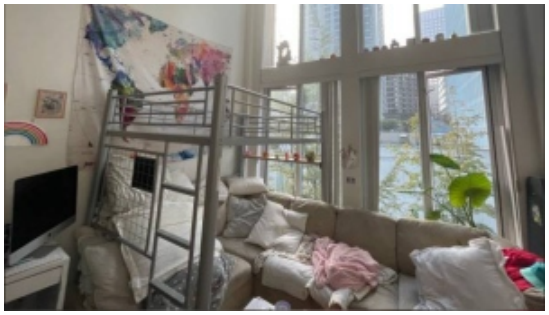

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